

Managing sickness absence related to Long Covid FAQs

We are committed to improving the health, wellbeing and attendance of all employees. We value the contribution our employees make to our success. So, when any employee is unable to be at work for any reason, we miss that contribution.

We recognise that there is a growing number of people experiencing symptoms of Long Covid which can impact day-day life including attending work. As such, we want to ensure we're supporting our employees' wellbeing and providing the right conditions to enable staff to return to work when they feel well enough to do so.

The following FAQs set out our approach to managing sickness absence related to Long Covid. This is an emerging condition so we will work with Public Health to regularly review our approach based on medical advice and any research which becomes apparent. It's important to note, symptoms of Long Covid can be complex and will vary from person to person so the course of action will differ depending on the context of the situation and the individual case.

Managers should contact their HR Business Advisor for advice on individual cases.

Managing Long Covid related sickness absence	
Q1	What is Long Covid?
A1	<p>Long Covid is where people suffer from poor health for a long period of time after getting the virus. The condition usually presents with clusters of symptoms, often overlapping, which can fluctuate and change over time and can affect any system in the body. It affects people in different ways and symptoms can vary from breathlessness and heart problems to joint and muscle pain, neurological problems such as lack of concentration, fever, exhaustion and mental health issues. The NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) has identified three types of 'Long Covid':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute COVID-19: signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for up to 4 weeks. • Ongoing symptomatic COVID-19: signs and symptoms of COVID-19 from 4 to 12 weeks. • Post-COVID-19 syndrome: signs and symptoms that develop during or after an infection consistent with COVID-19, continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis. <p>In addition to this, the following have been identified as common symptoms of Long Covid:</p> <p>Respiratory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathlessness • Cough <p>Cardiovascular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chest tightness • Chest pain • Palpitations <p>Generalised symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Fever • Pain <p>Neurological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive impairment ('brain fog', loss of concentration or memory issues) • Headache

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep disturbance • Peripheral neuropathy symptoms (pins and needles and numbness) • Dizziness • Delirium (in older populations) <p>Gastrointestinal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abdominal pain • Nausea • Diarrhoea • Anorexia and reduced appetite (in older populations) <p>Musculoskeletal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint pain • Muscle pain <p>Psychological/psychiatric</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symptoms of depression • Symptoms of anxiety <p>Ear, nose and throat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tinnitus • Earache • Sore throat • Dizziness • Loss of taste and/or smell <p>Dermatological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin rashes <p><i>Source: NICE, SIGN, RCGP: COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19</i></p> <p>Please note, this list is not exhaustive and we will regularly review based on medical advice and any research which becomes available.</p>
Q2	What should you do if you think you are suffering from Long Covid?
A2	<p>Although it is recognised as a medical condition, there isn't yet a diagnostic code for Long Covid as the symptoms are so varied. If you think you are suffering from the long term effects of Covid-19, you should book an appointment with your GP immediately. The NHS have invested in Long Covid assessment centres and are taking referrals from GPs for people experiencing brain fog, anxiety, depression, breathlessness, fatigue and other debilitating symptoms. Patients can access services if they are referred by a GP or another healthcare professional, so that doctors can first rule out other possible underlying causes for symptoms.</p> <p>NHS England has said there are now 69 clinics dedicated to assessing and supporting patients with long COVID around the country.</p>
Q3	What do we need to record your sickness as Long Covid?
A3	<p>We appreciate that it may be difficult to identify Long Covid due to the range of symptoms and changing severity of the condition. In order for us to record your sickness absence as 'Long Covid', you will need to provide your manager a copy of one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Long Covid referral letter from your GP/healthcare provider - A letter from the NHS Long Covid assessment centre confirming that you have Long Covid <p>Employees can self-certify their Long Covid symptoms for the first 8 days of absence following the end of their 10 day isolation period. On the 8th calendar day and going forward, you will need to provide one of the above letters to cover your absence.</p>

	<p>We understand that some GP appointments may not be scheduled within this 8 day period so managers will keep in regular contact with you and assess each case individually with advice from HR so records can be amended retrospectively. If you do not feel well enough to return to work following your isolation period, you should take as much time off as you need to recover. Alternatively, if you are experiencing mild symptoms you should discuss with your manager whether you can work from home and build in other adjustments to facilitate ongoing attendance following the end of your isolation period.</p>						
Q4	Will absence due to Long Covid count towards the trigger points in our Sickness Absence Procedure?						
A4	<p>Any absence due to contracting Covid-19 itself or periods of self-isolation will not count towards the standard absence trigger points. However, absence due to the effects of Long Covid will be monitored as part of our normal Sickness Absence Procedure. This is to support our employees and consider whether it would be helpful to get further medical advice from our occupational health provider on we how we can provide the most appropriate and best possible support.</p> <p>By monitoring the level of absence due to Long Covid, your manager will work with you to provide rehabilitation support such as phased returns, flexible hours or reviewing duties and making workplace adjustments to help facilitate a return to work.</p>						
Q5	What happens if the employee continues to feel unwell due to Long Covid and has reached the absence trigger points?						
A5	<p>As part of our normal Sickness Absence Procedure, we have a series of 'trigger points' that can help line managers to monitor sickness absence, and determine the appropriate course of action to support staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when absence exceeds 10 days in total within a rolling 12-month period; or • when absence occurs on five or more occasions within a rolling 12-month period; or • when a pattern emerges, (e.g. absence often occurs on Mondays and Fridays); or • once a member of staff has been away from the workplace for a continuous period of four weeks. <p>These trigger points are for guidance only – and are designed to support both you and your line manager in reviewing absence levels and deciding an appropriate course of action. Your manager should have open conversations if you have reached any of the trigger points to identify whether any reasonable adjustments can be made to support your attendance. Line managers should seek advice from our occupational health provider and their HR Business Advisor before deciding whether to take formal or informal steps. Search 'reasonable adjustments' on essentials for more information.</p>						
Q6	Will I receive sick pay if Long Covid prevents me returning to work for an extended period of time?						
A6	<p>We aim to fairly manage sickness absence and facilitate a return to work as soon as possible. If you follow the sickness absence reporting procedure, you will be entitled to sick pay, depending on the length of service as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Service</th> <th>Pay</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>First year of service</td> <td>1 month's full pay and (after 4 months' service) 2 months' half pay</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Second year of service</td> <td>2 months' full pay and two months' half pay</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Service	Pay	First year of service	1 month's full pay and (after 4 months' service) 2 months' half pay	Second year of service	2 months' full pay and two months' half pay
Service	Pay						
First year of service	1 month's full pay and (after 4 months' service) 2 months' half pay						
Second year of service	2 months' full pay and two months' half pay						

	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Third year of service</td> <td>4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fourth and fifth year of service</td> <td>5 months' full pay and 5 months' half pay</td> </tr> <tr> <td>After five years service</td> <td>6 months' full pay and 6 months' half pay</td> </tr> </table> <p>Employees may also receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or claim other state benefit.</p> <p>Managers should keep in regular contact with you to ensure you feel connected to your team. It's important to have open and empathetic conversations to identify what support you need to facilitate a return to work. Regular conversations should continue even if you are sick for more than four weeks (long term absence) due to Long Covid.</p>	Third year of service	4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay	Fourth and fifth year of service	5 months' full pay and 5 months' half pay	After five years service	6 months' full pay and 6 months' half pay
Third year of service	4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay						
Fourth and fifth year of service	5 months' full pay and 5 months' half pay						
After five years service	6 months' full pay and 6 months' half pay						
Q7	How do I record Long Covid related absence on Oracle?						
A7	<p>If you are sick and cannot work due to Long Covid, you will need to inform your manager immediately so this can be recorded on Oracle. Managers should enter this absence as 'Long Covid' starting from the day your initial isolation period ends i.e. day 11, and leave the end date open until you return to work.</p> <p>Please note, managers should not be entering 'Long Covid' as an absence reason if the employee is still within their 10 day isolation period and has tested positive – this should be recorded as 'Covid-19'.</p> <p>Click HERE for more information about recording Covid-19 related absences.</p>						
Q8	What support will be provided to help facilitate a return to work?						
A8	<p>If you are absent due to Long Covid, your manager will have a conversation with you to see if a phased return could support you to get back into work when you're ready. We encourage all line managers to have regular, open and empathetic conversations with staff before they return, to identify a suitable pattern, and when they return – to check in with staff and review and gradually increase the number of hours/meetings/pieces of work expected. Phased returns should be agreed where recommended by occupational health and only be used for a period of up to six weeks depending on the individual circumstances.</p> <p>Your line manager may also decide that further information is required, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referring you to our occupational health service, who may contact your GP or seek other appropriate medical advice; • look at the provision of some form of support to help improve your attendance, e.g. counselling through the EAP Service or Able Futures • organising a risk assessment; • organising a stress risk assessment to identify whether to review/reduce duties temporarily • considering whether to offer an employment break should your symptoms prevent you from returning to work for an extended period of time (6+ months). 						
Q9	Is Long Covid classified as a 'disability' under the Equality Act?						
A9	<p>It is too soon to identify whether Long Covid is likely to be classed as a disability under the Equality Act, but it could be if the symptoms have a significant impact on daily life and overall functioning of the individual. If the impact of the condition is long-term (with an actual or likely duration of 12 months or more) and it has a significant impact on the employee's ability to do day-to-day tasks (for example, working from home where this is possible, going into work where necessary, buying groceries, preparing meals for themselves) they could be disabled under the Equality Act.</p>						

	<p>It should also be kept in mind that sufferers of Long Covid may have a pre-existing condition (e.g. diabetes or asthma). Even if an individual’s post-Covid condition is found not to amount a disability itself, the combined effect with their pre-existing condition may result in an overall substantial and long-term adverse effect such that it could be classified as a disability.</p> <p>As part of Camden’s Disability Charter, we’re committed to making work more inclusive of persons with disabilities so they can, and want to, bring their best selves to work. We have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers that would otherwise prevent or make it harder for employees with disabilities to attend work.</p> <p>Should the effect of Long Covid persist for a duration of 12 months or more and has a severe impact on your overall wellbeing, line managers will need to speak to HR and consider a range of reasonable adjustments such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing someone to work from home as a standard practice; • Providing specialist software where appropriate for the role; • Adjusting working time or start and finish times to enable employees to regularly attend appointments; • Speaking to HR about granting ‘disability leave’ where appropriate. • Putting other appropriate adjustments in place, e.g. temporary alternative duties. • If you are absent for more than four weeks due to Long Covid, managers should consider a referral to Occupational Health for advice on offering a phased return to work and how best we can support you. • Conducting an ill-health redeployment search for alternative work. This is only appropriate following consultation with the employee where it is agreed that they cannot fulfil their current job, either with reasonable adjustments, or where such changes have been unsuccessful. Line managers must seek professional advice from the occupational health provider and HR before deciding to carry out a redeployment search.
<p>Q10</p>	<p>What happens if I experience severe long term effects of Long Covid and can no longer carry out my job?</p>
<p>A10</p>	<p>In some circumstances, where there is no realistic possibility, following medical advice, of a return to work, it may be necessary to escalate through the formal Sickness Absence procedure. We will do everything we can to support you and managers should seek HR advice when deciding how to manage this type of absence.</p> <p>In addition, employees are encouraged to contact our free independent financial advisors as they can help you understand how to plan your finances and work towards a secure future for you and your family. Click here for more information</p>